

THE STATE UNIVERSITY
AND
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION


AN ADDRESS BY

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When the federal constitution was framed, its writers omitted any provision for a relationship between the State and religion. They took the view, or appear to have taken the view, that the State as a political entity should not undertake to interfere in matters of conscience. The various states, as they have adopted their constitutions on admission to the Union, have taken the same attitude. Some critics of our constitution and form of government have, therefore, said at times that the federal constitution and the state constitutions were Godless and that our governments were Godless governments. The criticism is illogical and untrue. It is illogical because to say the constitution is Godless because God is not mentioned in it is to assume the very point to be proved, namely, that the inclusion of religious provisions is a necessary part of a political constitution. It is untrue because the men who made the constitution, the people who lived and live under it, and those who have had to do with its interpretation have been and are God-fearing and God-loving people. One might as well say that the charter of an industrial or commercial corporation is Godless because the Deity is not mentioned in it. The omission simply indicates that, in the opinion of those who framed the charter or the constitution, the organization in question was not one in which religious provisions belong.

The fathers of our country showed their wisdom in departing as they did from the Old World custom of mingling politics and religion, of trying to coordinate political and religious life by state action. Undoubtedly, they were led to take the view they did for two reasons. One of these was their profound conviction that religion is a matter of individual conduct, a responsibility of the individual conscience; a matter between the individual and his God and, perhaps, between the individual and other individuals whose religious convictions are like his own. Many of the settlers of our colonies had gone through bitter experiences in their attempt to gain religious freedom. They knew what it was to have their religious beliefs dictated to them by political authority. They knew what it meant to have other people give color to their beliefs and try to dictate limits to the action of their consciences. They had gone through the bitter struggle of trying to know God as they saw him and understood him, in the face of attempts of political authorities to make them see and understand God as others would have them. The so-called omission of God from the constitution was, therefore, nothing more nor less than a recognition of the right of every individual to freedom of religious opinion. It was virtually a negative declaration that under that constitution no citizen could ever be coerced in matters of religious belief.

Moreover, our forefathers knew their history. They were not so far removed in time from the bitter experiences of the religious wars

of previous centuries, the destruction which they had wrought in civil society, the wrongs which had been committed under them in the name of religion, and the aftermath of hostility that had embittered the lives and relations of multitudes of men, neighbors to one another, subjects or citizens of the same government, which had prevented them from achieving national unity, culture, and general civilization. Indeed, phases of religious persecution in the early history of our own people were too well known for the framers of the constitution to run any risk of breaking down their new civic structure under the weight of religious prejudice and persecution. They were too wise to lay foundations for possible future religious conflicts.

But that the omission of any mention of religion or of God in our constitutions implied lack of religion on the part of its framers or on the part of the people who have lived under these constitutions, is, as we all know, untrue. Take it all in all, there is no more religious people on the face of the earth than our own. While there is some evidence that the religious spirit has been weakened in recent decades, that sad result cannot be attributed in any degree to our constitution or our laws. That there has been a weakening of moral fiber, that there is some laxity of conscience in matters of religion, that many things formerly regarded as holy are now treated lightly, all of us, I presume, must admit. But these results are due to causes that have no relation to our political constitution.

Since neither the federal government nor the governments of the states include the regulation of religious matters within their purview, obviously institutions of the federal government or of the states cannot do so either. Hence, the educational systems of the states make no provision requiring the teaching of religion. This is as it should be, if, as we commonly think, religion is a matter of individual conscience, a matter between the individual and his God. The educational systems of the state, including, of course, the state university, cannot, therefore, undertake to train young men and young women committed to their charge in the tenets of religious doctrine. Even if it were politically permissible, it would be actually impracticable; for the only way in which it could be done would be to make provision for the teaching of religion in all the various forms represented by different religions and different sects. Unless we were to try to coerce the non-Christian to the study of the Christian religion, the Catholic to the study of religion as Protestants view it, or the Protestant to the study of religion as the Catholic views it; unless we were to compel the Turk, the atheist, the Mohammedan, the Confucian and the Buddhist to adopt and observe our forms of religion, it would be necessary to make provision for the recognition and teaching of all of them, possibly in the same educational institution. This, as I said, would be impracticable.

But the fact that express provision is not made for the teaching of religion in the public schools, including the state university, does not imply that the young men and women who attend the university

do not have the benefits of religious instruction. Still less does it imply that the importance of religious instruction as part of the necessary training of youth is not fully recognized, indeed as fully recognized by the staffs of publicly supported institutions as by those of the so-called denominational institutions.

| There is no complete education without religious training. The most important phase of education is the development of character. Character cannot be developed in the best sense without belief in, faith in, God. | For I do not agree with those people who, under the specious presentation of alleged scientific facts in anthropology and archeology, allege that our morals are wholly the result of habits established by the influence of our environment. | I believe that there is in the hearts of men a primordial instinctive belief in a Deity; that that belief is the basis of standards of conduct; that those standards of conduct determine in large measure, at least, the relation of the individual not only to the God in whom he believes, but to his fellow-men, children of the same God. | I know that this is an old-fashioned point of view. I know that many enthusiastic young students of anthropology, psychology and sociology, think they have found in the study of these sciences truths that will enable them to do without God because, forsooth, these facts may be used in such a way as to explain away some particular conception of the Deity which they may have had. Therefore, some of them tell us that our God, your God and mine, is the creation of our imagination, the result of habits adopted long ago by our forefathers and perpetuated and strengthened through environment and the hereditary influences of succeeding generations. They undertake to explain the wonders of the universe as merely psychological or physical or chemical phenomena, and, therefore, are able to separate morals and standards of morals from the idea of God. I do not myself so believe. | It is, indeed, possible to describe God and the universe, if you please, in the terms of any one of the different sciences; but descriptions of that kind are not explanations of the causes and, therefore, do not do away with the necessity for a great original cause. Admitting the existence of a great original cause, we must necessarily admit, it seems to me, that our conduct, that is, our morals, our idea of duty not only to God but to one another, must be based largely, if not wholly, upon our conceptions of what God is and what he requires of us. | From my point of view, therefore, morals depend largely upon religion. Since education, up to a certain point, at any rate, is primarily the development of character, and since character is, after all, the training in moral standards, and since training in moral standards depends upon religious belief, it follows that religious training is a necessary part of a complete education. |

The religious difficulties of college boys and girls usually arise from the natural tendency to laxity that comes from sudden release from parental authority, and also, in part, from the false sense of freedom which they get in their first incursions into new fields of thought. It is a curious phenomenon of human nature that when a new field of inquiry or study is discovered its devotees usually seize

upon what they think its lessons and conclusions to undermine old beliefs and standards. Thus to many the establishment of some of the doctrines of modern science meant the abolition of faith in God. A similar tendency has been observed with the development of the more recently established social sciences. The tendency here has been aggravated because the subject matter of these sciences is one in which even laymen think themselves entitled to express opinions. So subjects of social organization and reconstruction which can be properly understood and discussed only by those with profound knowledge of the subjects, have become the plaything of the superficial writer and the specious thinker. Not a little of the breakdown of our moral standards, not a little of the laxity of our lives, is due, in my opinion, to the fact that literary writers, before whom an uncritical and unthinking public bow down, have assumed the role of social philosophers and prophets of social progress, attempting to explain the life and purpose of society without knowing much about it and without reasoning as fairly and logically as such discussions require. In my opinion, much of the moral slime that has smirched the thought of the people, young and old, in the past twenty years has come from the literature of the day and not from the teaching of the colleges. To be sure, some professional social scientists are equally guilty. It is no wonder that young people have been led astray by the light of supposed authority. If your teachers in the Wesley Foundation are to do much good, they must command respect as authorities in their subjects, as well as for the profundity and tenacity of their religious faith.

Since a state university cannot, under the constitution and the laws, provide the religious training necessary to a complete and well rounded education, it must be provided in some other way. In the past the churches in the locality where a university existed, members of the faculty of the university and other citizens of the locality interested in such matters have always interested themselves in providing opportunities for religious study to the students of the universities. This method was feasible when the numbers of students were small; but after all, local churches had their own constituents and the attention which pastors and members of these churches could give to additional attendants or adherents from the university in the neighborhood was meager and certainly not adequate to promote the best religious welfare of the young people themselves. It was evident long ago that some special measures would be necessary to meet the situation. Thirty years ago or more I heard the subject discussed and the proposal made that the various denominations establish their own institutions or institutes in localities where state universities existed to give special attention to the young men and young women away from home who were members of their denominations. It was sometimes difficult, to be sure, to convince local pastors and sometimes the officers of the denominations that special provision was necessary or that a special need existed. Too many of them were content to regard their duty as done by acclaiming the alleged Godlessness of the insti-

tutions and urging the adherents of their denominations to go elsewhere. But the adherents of these denominations did not obey. In increasing numbers they flocked to the state universities where better provisions for scientific, literary, and other training were provided. So it happens that in the fall of this year the University of Illinois had among its students 1451 members of the Methodist Church and 359 non-members but adherents; 898 members of the Presbyterian Church and 218 adherents; 455 members of the Catholic Church and 22 adherents; 409 members of the Christian Church and 105 adherents; 329 members of the Congregational Church and 116 adherents; 325 members of the Baptist Church and 74 adherents; 273 members of the Episcopal Church and 41 adherents; 257 members of the Lutheran Church and 45 adherents. Thus it happened, too, that the University had three people of the Mohammedan faith, five of the Hindu faith, and representatives of the Buddhist, the Mormon and other churches and denominations. In short, there were at the University in all 4,700 young people who avowed themselves members of their various churches and 2,800 more who proclaimed themselves adherents. Surely he would be a rash man who would say that the responsibility of taking care of this great number of young people avowing a religious life should be cast upon the local churches and their pastors, prepared as they are to take care of ordinary congregations. Hence the logic of the situation has forced the recognition of the fact that special provision should be made. Such special provision has been made in various ways with more or less success at different universities at various times in the past twenty years. One of the most notable provisions and one which is undoubtedly most full of promise is the one for the dedication of which we are gathered here today.

The principle on which this new organization, the Wesley Foundation, is established is that the people of the Methodist Church shall make adequate provision for the religious training and social life of the young people of the University of Illinois who profess themselves as members or adherents of that church. It is intended to give here such courses of instruction of collegiate and university grade as are necessary to carry out the purposes of the Foundation. Some of these will undoubtedly be of a sufficiently literary, scientific, or cultural character to deserve recognition towards a University degree, and arrangements looking in that direction have already been made. These arrangements will simply mean that students who take certain courses given by the staff of the Foundation may, under proper conditions, get credit for them towards their University degree, precisely as if they had transferred from colleges in some other part of the State. From this point of view and for this purpose the Wesley Foundation, and all others like it, are regularly chartered educational institutions and will receive the same treatment as any regularly chartered educational institution in the matter of transfer of credits. It is to be hoped that at an early date the people of the other churches or denominations will follow the splendid example which the Methodists of the State and country have set by the erection of this noble building and the estab-

lishment of this great Foundation. It is my hope, too, that the Wesley Foundation may grow into a sphere of usefulness far beyond that contemplated by those who first had the vision or those who have brought it to its present consummation. It is my hope and prayer, as I know it is the hope and prayer of all the members of the faculty of the University, that these young people will be refreshed and strengthened in their faith by the things that they will study and hear in this noble building; and that the inspiration of their religious teachers here and the refreshment which they will gain from social life here will not only strengthen them for finer and better work in the studies of the University curriculum, but will supplement those studies and in conjunction with them will round out the characters and lives of the young people who in the coming years will throng this hall.

I am sure that I can speak not only for myself but for the faculty of the University in offering you heartiest congratulations on the successful accomplishment of this great dream. I pay my tribute of respect and admiration to the man who first dreamed that dream, to the men who caught his inspiration and carried it to a realization, to the man who through the last fourteen years, amid discouragements which you and I will never know, at last is able to look upon the physical realization of his great vision. Terah died in Haran, far away from his goal. Moses was taken to the mountain top and shown the land he was never to enter. Multitudes of men in all spheres and walks of life have dreamed dreams they have never realized and projected plans they have never been able to complete. Dr. Baker is more fortunate. He has not only dreamed the dream and seen the vision and projected the plan, but he remains among us to put it into operation, to see the results of its operation, to watch its influence, to determine the measure of its success, and to devise projects for making even better that which he has brought to so successful and splendid a conclusion. May he long remain among us carrying on the great work to which under God he has committed himself in these past fourteen years. We, in this community and in this University, would not be what we are if we had not had in our midst Dr. Baker and other men consecrated as he is to the service of God in the improvement of the life of our young people in the University. I thank God that the Methodists of Illinois have done this thing. In doing it they have served God in a larger measure and in more ramified ways than they yet realize. It will be a generation before they will be able to understand, still less to appreciate, anything like the full measure of the good that the institution of the Wesley Foundation will do for the Methodist students of the University of Illinois. I pray God that it will not be long before similar Foundations are erected by the other churches.

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